

Queen's Speech: Police concerns about new powers

Police have raised concerns about new powers which will force officers to investigate any incident of anti-social behaviour which is reported to them by at least three households.



Police are criticised over use of cautions for sex offenders Photo: ALAMY

By Steven Swinford

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The powers, introduced in the Queen's speech, are intended to ensure that the police take "persistent" nuisance seriously and mark the end of Asbo's, Labour's flagship policy.

However, the Police Federation has warned that the new measures could see police inundated with "spurious complaints" which would waste valuable resources.

Steve Williams, chairman of the Police Federation, said: "This has to be very carefully done because there is a risk that police could be inundated with spurious complaints. We have limited resources, especially in these times of austerity."

The anti-social behaviour revamp formally ends the Asbo and replaces it with separate court orders which ministers claim will allow for swifter action.

The effectiveness of the Asbo has been criticised over the years with critics arguing it has become little more than a badge of honour for jobs.

The number of anti-social behaviour measures have been reduced from 16 to six.

However the new "community trigger" scheme has already attracted concerns after being trialled in four areas.

According to figures compiled by Labour, only a negligible number of people have been taking advantage of the scheme.

As of January only four had been used in Manchester, while there were just five cases in Boston and West Lindsay

Gloria De Piero, the Shadow Home Secretary, said: "People want swift action to deal with anti-social behaviour.

"By the time the community trigger is reported it is already too little, too late. We're concerned that people just give up."

The anti-social behaviour, crime and policing bill also introduces a "community remedy", which gives victims a greater say in out of court sanctions for offenders.

The government is also introducing measures to tackle irresponsible dog ownership following years of campaigning by groups including those representing postal and other workers.

The offence of owning or being in charge of a dangerous dog in a public place will be extended to private property. If people's pets attack guide dogs it will be considered an "aggravated offence".

The anti-social behaviour, crime and policing bill also introduces tougher penalties for importing or exporting guns, a measure intended as a crackdown on the use of illegal firearms by gangs.

There are also new measures to make forced marriage a criminal offence, tighten Britain's extradition arrangements and extend witness protection.

The new powers on irresponsible dog ownership were welcomed by the Communication Workers Union, which represents postmen and women and telecoms engineers, who suffer around 5,000 dog attacks each year.

Seven out of 10 attacks take place on private property where the law does not apply in England and Wales.

The CWU launched a campaign in 2008 seeking new dangerous dogs laws to improve responsible dog ownership and reduce the number and severity of attacks.

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